SONGS OF THE OLD SOUTH

HOWARD WEEDEN

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Songs of the Old South

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Verses and Drawings by

Howard Weeden

Author of "Bandanna Ballads" and "Shadows on the Wall"

"*I'll south with the sun and keep my clime*"

SIDNEY LANIER

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HOWARD WEEDEN

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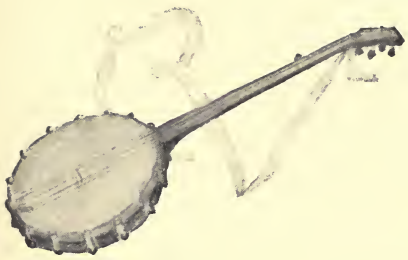
DEDICATED

TO

THE ONE MOST DEAR



Prefatory Note

THESE modest songs and pictures, snatched from the fading remnant of a people now nearly passed away, are only valuable because the Past is always precious, and only

"— beautiful for being old and gone."

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WHEN THE ANGELS CALL

When the Angels Call

"Mammy, dear Mammy, what do you see
When you lift such wistful eyes?"
"Faces, my chile, of dem dat are gone
Who smile at me out of de skies."

"Mammy, dear Mammy, what do you hear
When you look so far away?"
"Voices biddin' me come, my chile,
To Heaven, to rest an' stay:

"An' Mammy would gladly go to dat rest
When de angels beckon so —
But who would pillow her baby's hade
If baby's Mammy should go!"

OLD WATT AND THE RABBITS

Old Watt and the Rabbits

Dat thing of rabbits havin' sense
  Like other folks, is gospel true:
I've heard it tole by dem dat knows
  An' 'sides of dat I've seen it too;

One night I come home thro' de woods
  An' in a clearin' 'mungst de oaks,
I saw some rabbits havin' church
  As pompous as de bes' of folks:

Dey give experience, an' dey sung,
  An' den dey 'zorted, an' den prayed,
An' everything was done de way
  Dat other sinners' church is made:

An' while one preached de others slept
  As sensible as we all do;
An' den, de meetin' havin' broke,
  Dey went like us, home two an' two.

An' when dey 'gin to pint an' talk
  'Bout one another mean, why *den*
I says, says I, dem rabbits sho'
  Got sense de same as men!

LEFT BEHIND

Left Behind

When my ole Master took down sick
I nussed him till he died,
An' many a pleasant day we had —
Me sittin' by his side.

We talked about de ole, ole times,
Part fun, an' part de truth,
But mostly Master mused on Her,
De Mistis' of our youth:

She was so bright an' quick, he said,
She even died dat way —
An' went before *him* forty years
A-smilin' — swif' an' gay:

" But you slow cuss," he said to me,
" You always *was* behin'!
" Come on!" an' wid dat word he went —
An' lef' his hand in mine!

SILENT STRINGS

Silent Strings

For all dat it hangs so silent now,
Dis banjo once was gay,
An' it wove de dreams dat I had of her
Into chunes as sweet as May.

An' often I thought that its quiverin' strings
Must be of myse'f a part —
Else how could dey tingle an' thrill as dey did
If her shadow but fell on my heart!

But de dreams an' de chunes has bof passed away
An' nothin' is lef' for to tell her:
De banjo she likes bes' to listen to now
Is played by a happier feller!

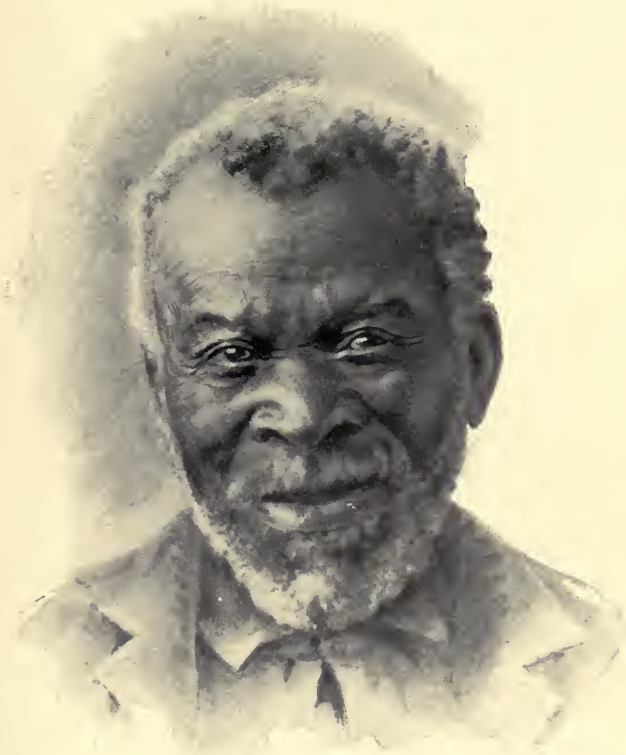
A TOAST

A Toast

Whenever you want a drink dat shall mean
De best in de way of water,
Jes' manage to take it out of a gode
An' den hit will taste like hit oughter.

No matter de place, hit will put you at home
As if you an' godes was kin,
An' you know you can't feel as friendly as dat
Wid a citified dipper of tin!

You can drink to de fields, you can drink to
de crops —
You can drink to your work an' your load —
You can drink to everything simple an' true,
When you drinks fum a country gode!



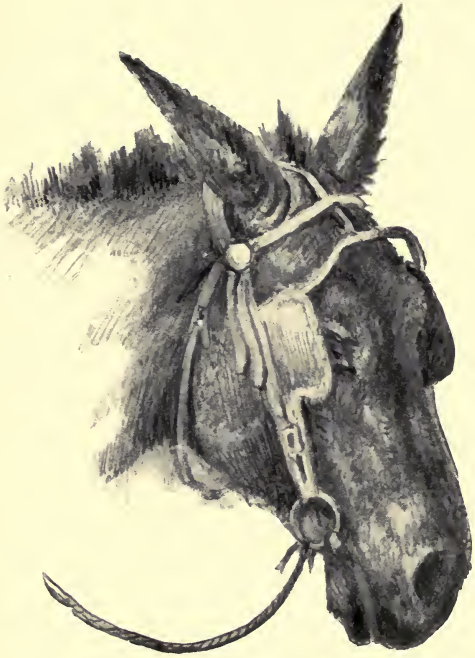
AT EASE

At Ease

I tried to live in town, but oh!
De town was swif' an' I was slow,
So back I came to de cotton rows
An' one ole mule I'm sure I knows.

He don't expect no more of me,
Thank God, den I expects of he;
An' I don't 'spect no more of he
Den likewise he expects of me.

So I don't feel ashamed no mo'
Of bein' black an' mean an' slow,
Because you see dis ole mule Jeff
Knows 'zactly how it is his sef'!

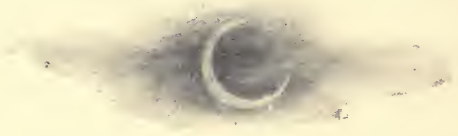


THE SONG OF THE WATCHER

The Song of the Watcher

A small moon hangs in de mornin' sky,
A chile is come wid de dawnin':
De soul of de Mother takes its flight
Early in de mornin':

De baby hastens into de worl'
Eager to meet de dawnin';
But de soul dat *knows* — it speeds to its Rest
Early in de mornin'!



DANCING IN THE SUN

Dancing in the Sun

A small brown ragged shadowy boy,
  A silhouette of fun,
And a shadow as ragged and slim as himself
  A-dancing in the sun;

It is hard to tell the shadows apart
  So into each other they run,
As dark and elusive they melt and they whirl
  And mix — as they dance in the sun.

No matter what falls to the rest of the world
  No matter what's done or undone —
So the day be but idle and long enough
  For dancing in the sun!

A SONG

A Song

River, roll away from me
An' steal as you pass de cane
A whisperin' sigh — to lose it again
When you reach de shinin' sea.

River, roll away from me
Through banks of jessamine sweet,
An' bear de odorous breaf till you meet
An' give it away to de sea.

Sighs an' sweets you may give to de sea;
I only ask dat de notes
Of dis song of Love dat softly floats
You will bear to Her — from me!

HUSH

Hush

In the place where they make all the drowsy things
Like Sleep, and Dreams, and the rest,
It is said that the drowsiest thing that is made
Is a Mammy's deep dark breast.

It is deep so that Life shall have one hiding-place
Where its fret and its noises may cease;
And dark that the light of the garish day
May have its one shadow of peace.

And the angels who come down to watch over sleep
Look first for these sheltering nests,
And give the most beautiful dreams that they bring
To the babes on the darkest breasts.

NOCTURN

Nocturn

When de weary day in de fields is done,
  An' you plods todes home at night,
De light dat you sees in your cabin-door
  Is sweet as a heabenly sight,

An' it glows through de glimmerin' purple dusk
  Wid a light dat is tender an' true,
When you know dat it's busy cookin' for you
  A handsome 'possum-stew!

MULLEN

Mullen

You may say all you will of what doctors kin do
  Wid deir 'scriptions an' dat sort of talk,
But if you is sick an' wants to be cured,
  Jis' git you a good mullen stalk!

De mullen don't need fer to feel of your pulse,
  Nor to ask about how do you do:
De tea when you 've swallowed hit knows where
    to go
  'Dout askin' no questions of you.

Of course dere are things even mullen can't do
  Like makin' a fool-nigger smart,
An' dey say dat de strongest dose ever took,
  Never cured a achin' heart.

But for natchel, old-fashioned, an' everyday
    pains
  Like sensible folks do have,
Jis' take a good swallow of she-mullen tea
  An' tech up wid she-mullen salve!

OLD MIS'

Old Mis'

You never knowed Ole Mis', you say?
Well, dat's a pity, shore;
De sort of Quality she was
Is gone — to come no more.

Her gracious word was like a Queen's,
So kine an' yet so strong;
We all kep' time to her sof' speech
Like marchin' to a song.

A nigger didn't dare to die
Nor marry on our place
Widout she give her blessin' an'
Her 'pinion on de case;

She knowed more den de doctors, 'case
God tole her what to give;
She knowed more den de preachers, 'case
God tole her how to live.

Dat ole plantation hit was run
On 'rangements 'bout like dis:
De place hit b'longed to Master, but
Ole Master b'longed to Mis'!

'WAY DOWN SOUTH

'Way Down South

An azure sky — a warm brown face —
Soft black eyes and a dazzling mouth —
A red bandanna, touched with gold —
And this is the color — 'way down South.

A bird that plays on a mocking flute —
A melting drawl from a smiling mouth —
A tinkling banjo hid in the shade —
And this is the music, 'way down South.

SITTING IN THE SUN

Sitting in the Sun

Long time I wandered far from home,
  But now my travelling's done —
I'm 'way down South once more — once more
  An' sittin' in de sun.

It warms my cold old blood again
  An' brings back youth an' fun,
An' I jes' dozes — sleeps — an' dreams
  A-sittin' in de sun.

De warm wind brings de scents I knew
  When life was jes' begun,
An' faces dat I early loved
  Smile at me in de sun.

An' some day when de sleep is sound,
  My soul will slip an' run
From dis ole Self dat sits an' smiles
  So quiet in de sun!

WHEN MANNERS WERE IN BLOOM

When Manners were in Bloom

You say you would paint my manners too
  Along wid my head, — if you could;
Well, you should have lived in olden times
  When manners was really good!

De days was sweet an' warm an' long,
  Wid plenty of time to be kine,
An' every one smiled an' bowed an' scraped
  An' every one did it fine!

I seem to smell de locust flower
  Heavy after rain —
An' de ghostly scent of mimosa blooms
  Comes blowin' back again;

An' I feels de fine ole mannerly times
  Mix wid de scents till I seem
To see ole Master as natchel as life —
  Bow in a kin' of dream:

His manners was certainly quality ways,
  De finest dat ever I see;
Dough folks used to laugh an' say dat he took
  Dem gilt-edged ways from me!

LONG AGO

Long Ago

Brightes' heavens used to smile
Blue an' low,
Softes' breezes used to sigh,
Long Ago!

Reddest roses used to bend,
Blush, an' blow,
Faires' mornings used to dawn,
Long Ago!

Sweetes' smile of all the smiles
I used to know,
Made de worl' like dat for me
Long Ago!

THE WORST OF WAR

The Worst of War

When my young master went to war
He carried me wid him too,
An' dough I never fired a shot
Dere was plenty else to do.

He wore de sword an' buttons an' spurs,
An' none was so brave as he;
But never so hard a thing did he do
As the thing he lef' for me.

Where a storm of leaden hail fell thick
He got a ball in his heart
An' died wid a happy smile on his face —
But mine was de harder part:

I led his horse back home where dey sat
Expectin' *him* — an' I saw
Mistis' an' Master's hearts when dey broke —
An' dat was de worst of war!

RESTING

Resting

No — slavery wasn't bad enough
To make my memory fret,
'Twas only dat I was so drove
I ain't got rested yet.

So when I hears you talk of heaben
An' wings — an' flyin' 'round —
I sighs an' says, " If hit suits God,
I'll take heaben sittin' down ! "

HARD WORKED

Hard Worked

"Old man with the sweet, black, patient face,
Pray tell me about your life;
It has had its many griefs, I'm sure,
And its noble work and strife."

"Yes, sir, dat's right: in slavery times
My business used to be
To hunt ole Master's specks, an' dat
Did shorely pester me;

"Since Freedom come I've had a load
Of politics to tote;
For if you does it right, it takes
All of your strenk to vote!"

AT LAST

At Last

De road is grown so rough an' dark
I tries no more to roam —
I'm standin' tired by de way
Fer God to lead me Home.

De friends I knew are gone, an' none
Are lef' to understan',
But God, who loves an' understan's,
He holds me by de han'.

A lonely Peace is come at las' —
An' now I waitin' see
De hinderin' things all fall away
An' leave jes' God an' me!

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

The Arabian Nights

When life was young an idle rhyme
  Could charm the happy time,
And Mammy gave us, with a kiss,
  A song that went like this:
" De Squirrel has a bushy tail,
  De 'Possum's tail am bare,
De Raccoon's tail am ringed all 'round,
  De old Hare's tail aint dere."

Our Mammy was the wit and sage
  Of all that golden age:
And when she sung a song like this
  She steeped the night in bliss:
" De Squirrel has a bushy tail,
  De 'Possum's tail am bare,
De Raccoon's tail am ringed all 'round,
  De ole Hare's tail aint dere!" *

* The old friend, upon whose memory the author draws for much that is in this book, listens backward seventy years, and hears this song.

FROST WORK

Frost Work

When plenty ripe persimmons make
A 'Possum hunt jis' right,
An' frost has teched your spirits till
Dey's feelin' kind o' light,
'Tis time to take your banjo down
Fum off the cabin wall
An' weave a little song in praise
Of 'Possum-time an' fall!

When evenin' fires softly throw
Your tremblin' shadow tall
To meet an' kiss Her shadow as
It beckons on de wall —
'Tis time to take your banjo down
An' make de music stir
Wid weavin' happy songs in praise
Of 'Possum-time an' Her!

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